

Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee – 26 February 2024

Agenda item 5 – Public Participation

Questions received

1. Question from Andrew Davis

“Why doesn’t the Speed Policy take account of exceptional circumstance in allowing a 20 mph limit as in the case of the dangerous A350 that dissects Fontmell Magna?”

Footnote:

Dorset Highways take a narrow interpretation of the 2013 DfT Guide on Speed limits. This states applications for 20-mph should not be on roads where the movement of motor vehicles is the primary function, i.e. A roads. **BUT** the same DfT guidelines also states:

(Para 84) Based on this positive effect on road safety, and a generally favourable reception from local residents, traffic authorities are able to use their power to introduce 20mph speed limits or zones on:
- major streets where there are – or could be - significant numbers of journeys on foot, and/or where pedal cycle movements are an important consideration, and this outweighs the disadvantage of longer journey times for motorised traffic.

2. Question from Peter Mole, Fontmell Magna Community Speed Watch

Almost 2 years ago I and others explained the dangerous road safety situation in Fontmell Magna where vulnerable pedestrians have to share the carriageway with hundreds of speeding vehicles. We generally do not have footways. Our ancient roads including the A350 are not engineered or regulated to be fit for purpose.

Councillors complemented us on our well informed and articulate representations and declared “we must listen and act!”.

I coordinate our Community Speed Watch Team. We did our most recent monitoring session on the A350 where children going to and from school, elderly dog walkers and others have to share the narrow road with hundreds of speeding vehicles each day. Alarming incidents including near misses with young children are too frequent and nervous people now use the car for village journeys of a few hundred yards or stay at home.

Any speeds much above 20 mph at the monitoring point are very dangerous as pedestrians and vehicles mix. There is currently a 30mph limit. We recorded over 20% of vehicles travelling at 35 mph or more which is 6 times the average level of offending at Speed Watch sites across Dorset. Each day hundreds of southbound vehicles traverse this point at speeds which would make them liable for prosecution. Children, the elderly and others are exposed to needless high risk. ROSPA estimate that in collisions child injuries treble when speeds are 30mph rather than 20 and the

chance of death for adults increases eightfold. The statistics are shocking, and we do not wish a tragedy to be the trigger for remedial action.

Our request for a 20mph limit, supported by 5 out of 6 residents, has been turned down for reasons which would not be considered reasonable in the majority of local authorities in the UK today or pass informed third-party scrutiny.

You know our roads are not currently engineered or regulated to be fit for purpose. Across the UK 20mph policies have been introduced in the majority of local authorities which would address the shameful situation in Fontmell Magna. Will action be taken to ensure all road users who have to share the carriageway, including the most vulnerable, have their needs fully taken into account to prevent their current exposure to unreasonable levels of risk?

3. Question from John Roberts-Davies on behalf of Fontmell Magna Parish Council

This question relates to the policy in general and how it has been applied so far. Any references to our own previous application are intended as examples.

For an application to be rejected, as was the case in Fontmell Magna for example, on the grounds that the A350 is a “strategic” route, where the movement of vehicles is the primary function, is clearly not what is intended by government guidance, which presupposes fitness of purpose.

In the last ten years across the UK scores of dangerous primary routes have had 20 mph sections introduced, where risk management demonstrates this as the best form of risk containment.

The A350 is a prime example of risk to human life being above normal and reasonable levels, therefore risk containment is essential.

Rejecting any 20mph application simply based on Dorset Council’s chosen categorisation of a road within it, fails to meet Dorset County Council’s responsibilities under the Equality Act.

The Equalities Impact Assessment made by Mr Burden states in 12.1 of the report presented today that

The policy is directly aimed at having a positive impact on vulnerable road users including children and the elderly.

This starts at the application stage when Members, Parish and Town Councils are required to consider these concerns, and they will then form part of the evidence base for an application.

The potential benefits to vulnerable road users are considered throughout the process.

A grandmother walking her child from one part of the village to the school, along a road with very poor sightlines and no footway, where there is a serious risk of death or injury, would be right to feel let down by how this policy has been applied.

Residents of a village which is cut in two by such a road have an equal right to enjoy the outdoor environment, to access local businesses such as the shop or pub, to meet together at their village hall, or simply to walk their dog, without having to drive to do so.

They should not need to resort to using their car as a means of self defence in their own village.

People should not need to use their car as a means of self defence.

The primary purpose of a road should not be a label applied glibly along its entire length. Common sense says that at some points on any road, protection of vulnerable users could be the priority.

Will the council instruct the person responsible for ensuring the safety of all road users to investigate the problem and propose a solution?

Statements received

1. Statement from Ian Vaughan-Arbuckle – Councillor Langton Matravers Parish Council with specific responsibility for Highways

Now that 20 mph has been approved through the centre of Langton Matravers, the Parish Council wish to thank the Place and Resources Committee and others in Dorset Council for the way the 20mph policy was designed and implemented. Tony Burden, the Road Safety Officer, who was responsible for implementing the detailed policy, deserves particular thanks for the calm and even-handed way he managed matters. No query was too much trouble so that applicants felt their interests were receiving prompt and appropriate consideration throughout a protracted period. The approval of this policy will make a huge difference to both the safety and quality of life of those who live in the village. Thank you.

2. Statement from John Adlam

Comment

It appears that the Dorset Council (DC) 20mph policy and implementation procedures are significantly at odds with the County's Local Transport Plan 3 commitments and national standards. All people should be free to choose their mode of transport and to move safely across and alongside all DC highways passing through villages and built up areas. This is not the case to date.

The policy and implementation should support communities when:

- Safety risks have been identified.
- Residential properties front the highway.
- Footways are absent.
- Schools, shops, businesses, amenities and services are adjacent to and/or directly dependent on pedestrian access via the highway.

- There is an absence of safe pedestrian thoroughfares directly resulting in an increased use of motor vehicles for community travel in lieu of cycling or walking.
- The highway fails to meet current safety design standards for its designated or actual use.

Safety improvements should be risk managed and include, singularly or in combination (but not be limited to), highway realignment, footway construction, traffic calming measures, injury reducing speed limits (20mph), and signage where feasible. Where overall safety risk cannot be mitigated the reasons should be stated by DC and all road users alerted by DC to heightened or sustained risk.

Background

Dorset's historic strategic road network is compromised in parts by outdated design and persistent use of modern means of transportation including silent electric and heavy goods vehicles. In parts single carriageways (including designated strategic routes) have insufficient width for large vehicles to pass. In villages where this occurs, where highways do not include footways, there are poor sight lines and speed restrictions exceed 20mph, it is invariably not safe for pedestrians without the introduction of mitigating safety measures.

National standards are unequivocal and compelling when it comes to highway safety. Highways England states its ambition to ensure that its major roads are more dependable, durable and most importantly - safe. It works hard to make sure that its road network is:

- Free flowing - where routine delays are infrequent and journeys are reliable.
- Safe and serviceable - where no-one should be harmed when travelling or working.
- Accessible and integrated - so people are free to choose their mode of transport and can move safely across and alongside its roads.

3. Statement from Dilys Gartside – 20sPlentyforDorset campaign coordinator

A year after introduction of its policy on 20mph speed limits, proportionately just a handful of Dorset residents have jumped through the criteria hoops set down by Dorset Councillors to achieve a 20mph limit on their streets. Many thousands of residents, whose parish or town council have attempted to clear these hoops, have either tripped or failed to jump clear and learned they do not qualify for safer streets and yet, ironically, these are the folk whose cry for help is the most urgent.

In summer 2022, residents campaigned successfully for the new policy to be inclusive of category A and B roads since these are the arteries of many Dorset villages and essential routes for all people to get from AtoB. Perhaps the most justified case is that of FONTMELL MAGNA whose village street happens to be categorized as A350. Its residents must use that main street to exit front doors and to get to the village's amenities, without the safety barrier of a footway nor visibility due to bends. Sharing that space with a high volume of heavy and ever increasingly wider vehicles which take up more than their safe share of road space is enough to deter most residents from walking or cycling or scooting their journey and often have

to move home to live elsewhere. Yet, their application for slowing speed on their village street was declined by Dorset Council, thus ignoring DfT guidance that: 'the needs of vulnerable road users **MUST** be fully taken into account when setting speed limits'

Given the known causal links between muscle inactivity and the major health risks such as obesity, diabetes, osteo-arthritis, heart disease and dementia which affect us more as we age and the desperate needs of our financially failing Health Service to meet these ever increasing demands and the soaring costs of adult social care which are crippling this country, every councillor must take responsibility for bold action in combating this down spiral. Vibrant communities are seen to flourish in those towns and cities whose councillors have had the vision to lead from the top and introduce 20mph in places where people must mix with motors.

I suggest that Dorset Council is failing its people with the complexity of its current 20mph policy and that its funding could be spent far more effectively by rolling out wide area 20mph starting with places where the people are already shouting out for slower traffic speeds.